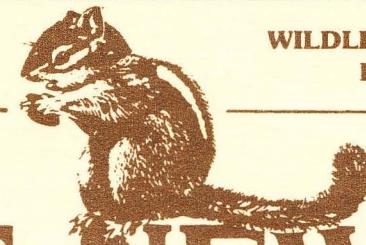


WEST VIRGINIA NONGAME NEWS

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 3

SUMMER 1985



The Aerial Angler

by David L. McConnell

West Virginia University

The next time you're out fishing along a stream or pond, keep an eye out for a fellow fisherman. He won't be wearing waders or carrying a pole, but he knows every still, clear pool found along a stream. This angler is the belted kingfisher, a funny looking bird with a head and bill that seem to belong on a bird twice its size.

Once found in every county of West Virginia, the kingfisher has become increasingly uncommon. This is by and large due to stream acidification and the resultant decrease of fish populations, the kingfishers' major food source. Although the conditions of streams have improved greatly in recent years with a subsequent increase in aquatic life, this bird is still scarce or absent over wide portions of the State.

The kingfisher is slightly larger than a robin, with a long, stout bill. It has a blue-gray back and crested head, with a white chin and belly separated by a bluish band running across its chest. The white undersides help the bird blend into the light background of the sky, making it less visible to its potential supper below. The female is unusual in that she is more colorful than her mate, having a second band of reddish-

brown that extends across her chest and sides.

Kingfishers pair for life and usually set up housekeeping along a stream or pond. The birds will select a series of perches overlooking the water, from which they hunt. These perches are often located over still pools where there is little surface rippling. This enables the bird to see deeper into the water. The site must also be free of underwater obstructions since the bird is a diver, and branches would get in the way. While the kingfisher isn't shy about taking a trout or two that might swim into the open, most of the fish it feeds upon are the slower moving chubs, daces, and small suckers. When a potential meal swims into range, the bird will plunge headfirst into the water and catch the fish in its bill. Once the fish is firmly in its grasp, the kingfisher flaps back to the surface and returns to its perch. There it beats the fish upon a limb and tosses it into the air, swallowing it head first.

Some fishermen resent the kingfisher taking trout from their streams, but since trout usually stay under cover and only dart out into the open to grab a morsel of food, few are caught by the birds. Actually, the kingfisher may help the trout by eating chubs and suckers that feed upon trout fry and eggs.

Kingfishers differ from most birds in that they do not build a traditional nest. Instead, they dig a burrow three to seven feet into the sides of a stream bank or bluff. A nest chamber 10 inches long and about seven inches high is then excavated at the end of the bur-

row. Since the birds put so much time into the nest's construction, they will reuse the chamber from year to year. The chamber is not usually lined with vegetation or feathers, but will accumulate a shiny layer of fish scales and bones. If there are no suitable banks along the stream, the bird will look for alternative sites away from the water. Some birds have been found nesting in tree cavities, although this is unusual.

In late April or early May, six to seven white eggs are laid and both parents take turns incubating them. In about 24 days the young will hatch out, and after three weeks will be ready to venture out of the chamber. Once the young are flying, they will stay with their parents a few days to learn how to fish before moving out on their own.

The kingfisher utters a loud, rattling cry as it flies and just before it dives into the water with a decided splash. Many a fisherman has been startled and dismayed as this expert aerial angler plunges into a pool only a few feet away, to emerge with a fish to add to its creel!



Nongame Project Review

● Cooperative Projects

Application booklets for the 1986 Cooperative Project Grants are now available. Any club, organization, or institution can apply for a grant of up to \$500 for projects which benefit nongame wildlife. Applications for 1986 grants must be postmarked by October 31, 1985. Those awarded grants will be notified in January of 1986.

● Small Research Grants

This year the Nongame Cooperative Projects Program is offering a separate small research grants category in which two \$500 grants will be awarded. These grants will allow for wildlife research and inventory activities. Although all research proposals pertaining to nongame wildlife will be considered, priority shall be given to projects which address the population status or natural history of nongame wildlife species deemed by the Wildlife Resources Division to be of special concern. A current list of these species is available upon request from the Nongame Program.

College and university professors, students and others who can conduct a scientifically sound research project are invited to apply. Requests are not to exceed \$500 and only one proposal per submittee will be considered. Proposals will be judged by the Nongame Citizens Advisory Committee on the basis of scientific merit, compatibility with the goals of the Nongame Wildlife Program and qualifications of the research personnel. Submitted proposals should be brief (3 to 6 pages) and include the following: name, address, phone number, position and affiliation of investigators; a description of the project objectives, methods, location of study and schedule of activities; description of any collecting activities and designation of a repository for specimens collected; brief statement of investigator's qualifications; and a detailed budget. The deadline for submitting proposals is Thursday, October 31, 1985. Grants will be awarded in January and projects must be completed in one year.

● Endangered Bat Surveys

West Virginia is the home for 70% of all the endangered Virginia big-eared bats known to still exist. Population surveys were conducted by DNR biologists in June. The mammals were counted, using an infrared night scoping technique, as they emerged from caves to feed on insects. Results show that there are now 9 known colonies representing a total population of approximately 3,700 in WV. This denotes an increase of 10% over the past two years.

● Nongame Wildlife Weekend

Over 240 people representing five states attended the second annual Nongame Wildlife Weekend held at Blackwater Falls State Park June 7-9. Included in those participating were 30 teachers sponsored by the Nongame Wildlife Fund in order that they might learn about WV's nongame wildlife resources for classroom use.

Short presentations were given by experts on such topics as endangered species, flying squirrels, bird banding, gypsy moths, wetland creatures, ferns, edible wild foods, snakes and how to set up aquaria using native fishes. Special workshops were held for teachers and those interested in nature photography. In addition, field trips were conducted throughout the weekend. Discovered were a new location for the rare Cheat Mountain salamander - marking its lowest and most northern distribution - and four new records for butterfly species at Blackwater. Next year's event will again be held at Blackwater Falls State Park, June 6-8.

● Educational Brochures

Response to the Bluebird Brochure has been excellent, with over 700 requests received. The nongame staff is currently planning several additional brochures on a variety of subjects related to nongame wildlife, and we would like your help. Drop us a postcard with your ideas and suggestions.

● Fish Survey

The distribution study of WV fishes has entered its second field season this summer. Investigators are sampling the Coal River Drainage system and smaller tributaries of the Ohio River.

The last field season for this study will be in 1987. Information collected will lead to a publication entitled *The Fishes of West Virginia*. This useful book, the first of its kind for WV, will include the following information: a general overview and history of the drainage systems of the State, a discussion of the historical records of fishes found in the State, a dichotomous key to all fishes in WV, and identification, distribution, and habitat information for each species collected in the State. This latter section will include line drawings, a distributional map, and a brief discussion of the biology and habitat for each of the species collected.



Habitat Hint

The tiny, iridescent ruby-throated hummingbirds can be enticed to your backyard by making sure some of their favorite plants are there. Although attracted by all nectar-bearing flowers, they are particularly drawn to red tubular varieties such as trumpet vine, cardinal flower, coral honeysuckle, red impatiens, salvia and fuchsia. The bright red feeders available commercially will also draw them to practically any location you desire. A few tips include: make sure a bush, vine or tree is nearby for use as a perch; fill feeders with a cooled solution of no more than 1 part white sugar to 4 parts clear hot water (never use artificial sweeteners or honey solutions); and clean the feeders weekly with hot water and vinegar - no detergents.

Funding Update

Contributions to the Nongame Wildlife Fund via the income tax check-off amounted to \$75,190 for the 1984 tax year. Direct donations to the program in 1985 thus far equal \$1,600. The Children's Trust Fund, the other check-off on the 1984 tax form, generated \$88,500.

Only 3% of West Virginia citizens who received a state income tax refund contributed to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. If the other 97% had donated just one dollar, the Nongame Wildlife Fund would have grown by \$458,766. So this year remind your friends, neighbors and tax preparers to "check-off" for the Nongame Wildlife Fund and keep the "wild" in Wild Wonderful West Virginia.

Endangered Species Notes

● According to the National Wildlife Federation's Raptor Information Center, 130 bald eaglets were produced in 1984 from the 124 known nests in the Chesapeake Bay area. This is the highest number of birds recorded since 1977, the first year the Center began the study.

● The black-footed ferret may be the rarest mammal in North America. The ferret was first reported in 1851, and since then has only been sighted a few times. Its historic range encompassed short and mid-grass prairies from Western Canada south to Texas and Arizona. Associated almost exclusively with prairie dogs, the ferrets spend most of their time in the rodent's burrows, emerging usually only at night. Most sightings have been in South Dakota, where the "re-discovery" of ferrets occurred in 1964, leading to their placement on the National Endangered Species List the same year. Recently, a new colony was located in Wyoming. Field searches are continuing in several states for this rare mammal.

● The Virginia northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus fuscus*), known to occur in WV, was placed on the Federal Endangered Species List July 31, 1985. Refer to the article in this issue of the newsletter for more information on this secretive mammal.

Through The Eye Of A Newt

by Charles Rewa

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Elkins, WV

To the youngster with pants' legs rolled up past the knees and toes squirming in the mud, few creatures are as intriguing as the red-spotted newt suspended mystically in the shallow water of a farm pond. Inquisitive minds ponder on its strange habits, movements, and unknown origin. The visit to the pond would not be nearly so exciting without the anticipation of discovery in "newt country."

Newts are woodland salamanders, possessing 4 legs, an elongated body and tail, and smooth, moist skin. A closer look at this common amphibian of the Mountain State reveals some truly amazing characteristics. Newts have 3 life stages; living in the water as larvae and adults, and on the land in moist environments in a sub-adult phase known as the red-eft. Aquatic larvae resemble adults prior to the transformation into the eft stage.

These aquatic newts are extremely voracious, feeding on crustaceans, aquatic insects, small fish and even the eggs and larvae of other amphibians. Adults are olive green to yellow with an irregular pattern of red or orange spots on the darker back. Undersides of adults are light to countershade the body outline which serves as camouflage. Adults are often seen slowly swimming and drifting about the submerged vegetation as they forage for prey.

The terrestrial, red-eft stages, can live for several years. Efts look out of place as their fragile, blaze-red bodies boldly search the forest floor for snails and insects inhabiting the soil and leaf litter. Its body, about two inches long, seems less than half the size and weight of its pre-transformation, larval condition. Red-efts can travel up to a half mile from rearing ponds, making them appear totally independent of water. Though they may travel far in their months of over-land foraging, efts have the homing ability to return to the ponds or lakes where they were hatched, and where they metamorphose into breeding adults.

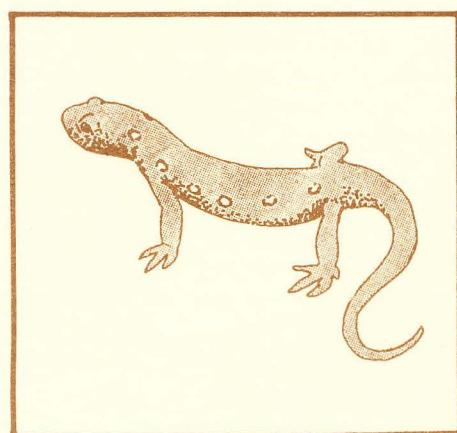
Newts breed in early spring in semi-permanent woodland pools throughout

the State. Adults may be present in the water all year or return from their terrestrial home to breed. Eggs are laid singly on the surface of submerged vegetation, rocks or other debris. Large clusters of hundreds of newts have been found in ponds in winter and late spring. This is generally not considered to be related to breeding activities, but may be a method to keep warm in frigid winter water.

Adult newts have an interesting method of self defense against predators. Their skin contains substantial amounts of a powerful neurotoxin, called tetrodotoxin. The poison seems to be effective in protecting newts from being preyed upon by certain fish, reptiles and other amphibians. While the skin of the aquatic larvae contains much less toxin, making them more vulnerable to predation, the eggs contain high levels and are not heavily preyed upon. The brilliant red efts are also unpalatable, perhaps partially explaining their bold feeding habits.

What does this strange creature have to offer the silent observer? Although the adults do not make good fishing bait, their colorful movements add character to the typical woodland pool or farm pond. They also play an important role as a predator in shaping the aquatic community.

So, the next time you're out along a pond and catch a glimpse of the strange looking creature suspended in the depths, you might want to think about the seemingly boring but truly dynamic life that is seen through the eye of a newt.



New Maryland Publication

The Maryland Natural Heritage Program has just published a 476 page book entitled *Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals of Maryland*. This publication contains 30 separate papers dealing with the State's rare plants and animals presented at a symposium held at Towson State University in Towson, Maryland. This is the first such publication for Maryland and should be an invaluable resource for naturalists, land use planners and interested individuals. The cost is \$13.00 per copy. Your check or money order should be made payable to the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and sent to: *Threatened and Endangered Plants and Animals of Maryland*, MD Dept of Natural Resources, Fiscal and Supportive Service Office, Tawes State Office Building, Annapolis, Md 21401-9974.

Nongame Check-Off States

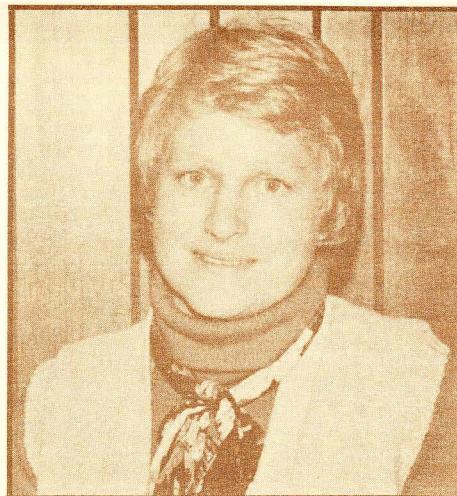
Mississippi has recently enacted legislation creating a nongame check-off on its state income tax return, making it the 33rd state to have such a program. These check-off programs, the idea for which originated in Colorado, are generating a total of more than \$8 million yearly in participating states.

Free Brochure

A brochure with color photographs of West Virginia's threatened and endangered wildlife resources is now available. Endangered species included in this publication are the bald eagle, eastern cougar, northern flying squirrel, peregrine falcon, Virginia big-eared and Indiana bats, and two freshwater mussels. A land snail listed as "threatened" in West Virginia is also included. This free brochure may be obtained by writing to: Endangered Species Brochure, WV Department of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 67, Elkins, WV 26241.

Tennessee Bird Atlas Project

Tennessee will conduct a 5-year breeding bird atlas project beginning in 1986. They have adopted the same size block as West Virginia and other atlas states. Tennessee bird watchers will have 720 such blocks to cover, as compared to about 500 in West Virginia. There are currently 20 other atlas projects in progress across the eastern U.S. and Canada. The WV breeding bird atlas is scheduled to be completed in 1988.



Advisory Council Member

Linda Cooper Elkinton's active interest in conservation issues was stimulated by the unique beauty of her homeland, the Canaan Valley. She attended Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, where she earned a B.A. in psychology and West Virginia University for a Master's Degree in social work. Mrs. Elkinton has been actively involved in many social programs in the State including projects on aging, women's issues, child and adult education, and rural community development. In addition, she has served as Assistant Regional Representative, Mid-Atlantic Region, of the National Audubon Society, and President of the WV Highlands Conservancy. Linda's wide range of interests and experience adds a special dimension to the Non-game Citizens' Advisory Council.

WV TNC Chapter Wins National Award

The West Virginia Chapter of The Nature Conservancy was awarded the Outstanding Chapter Progress Award for 1984. This award is one of only two presented annually to state chapters by the Conservancy's National Board of Governors.

During 1984 the WV Chapter conducted 14 land protection projects in the State totalling 1,595 acres. The estimated fair market value of those properties totalled \$1.3 million. Also during 1984, the Chapter launched its WV Natural Areas Campaign. This statewide campaign to protect 8 highly significant and threatened natural areas throughout the State has a fund-raising goal of \$200,000. To date, over \$140,000 in contributions have been raised for the campaign.

"In almost every program area, 1984 was the most productive in the 22-year history of our WV Chapter," commented the group's national president, William Blair. The Conservancy's WV State Director, Ed Maguire, remarked that "This high honor is a real credit to the job done by our in-state chapter board of trustees, our 1,200 chapter members, and our staff in West Virginia. But at the same time, we look upon the award as a challenge to continue the substantial progress that we've made in the State over the last few years."

The Nature Conservancy is a national, private, non-profit, land conservation organization with its headquarters in Arlington, Virginia. The organization has conducted over 3,700 land protection projects in all 50 states and some foreign countries, preserving a total of 2.4 million acres. Its system of 800 nature preserves is the largest private system of nature sanctuaries in the world.

For additional information on The Nature Conservancy, contact its WV Field Office, 1100 Quarrier Street, Room 215, Charleston, WV 25301.

Northern Flying Squirrel

by Ken Knight DNR Biologist

While many West Virginians have seen flying squirrels, whether in the woods, the attic, or backyard feeder, most are not aware that there are actually two different species of flying squirrels in the State. The common type that most of us are familiar with is the southern flying squirrel, named *Glaucomys volans* by biologists. The northern flying squirrel (*Glaucomys sabrinus*) is much less common and highly restricted in its distribution.

The southern flying squirrel is slightly smaller than a chipmunk, 7½ to 10 inches long, grayish-brown on the back and head, and snow-white on the belly. The tail is broad and flattened and is used to help balance and steer the animal during its soaring "flights."

The northern flying squirrel is very similar to its southern cousin in appearance, but is somewhat larger, with a total length of 9½ to 12 inches. Coloration of the fur is also similar except the belly hairs are light gray at the tips and dark gray at the bases. There are many physiological and behavioral differences between the two species, and they do not, in fact, cannot interbreed.

The flying squirrel doesn't actually fly as a bird does, but rather, glides from high to low points by outstretching a membrane which runs from each front leg along the body to the hind legs. Glides will normally range from 20 to 30 feet in length, though distances of more than 200 feet have been recorded.

Northern flying squirrels are nocturnal, that is they are active at night. Days are generally spent resting in a hollow tree or leaf nest. Although not highly vocal, they will emit a low, soft chirp or clucking sound when disturbed. Their diet consists mainly of beechnuts, hazelnuts, spruce seeds, various other nuts and seeds, and even fungi and lichens. There is no evidence that these mammals cache their food as do other members of the squirrel family. Predators of the flying squirrel

include barn, barred and great-horned owls, goshawks and red-tailed hawks, foxes, weasels, and housecats.

Nests can be found either in enclosed areas such as tree cavities or abandoned woodpecker holes, or outside protective enclosures among the branches of trees. These latter are constructed mainly of twigs, bark and roots. Larger nests will house the female and her litter and often have two or more entrances, while smaller nests are made for a single squirrel. They are lined with a variety of materials, including shredded bark, moss, lichens, feathers, grass, pine needles, leaves, or fur. Often the flying squirrels will also use these nests as feeding platforms.

Mating occurs in late winter to early spring. After a gestation period of about 40 days, litters of one to six squirrels are born. Generally, the female produces only one litter per season, and raises the young without help from her mate. Newborn squirrels weigh 1/5 ounce and are about 3 inches long. Their eyes and ears are closed and they are hairless. They grow quickly, however, and by 6 weeks of age are almost full-grown and ready to leave the nest.

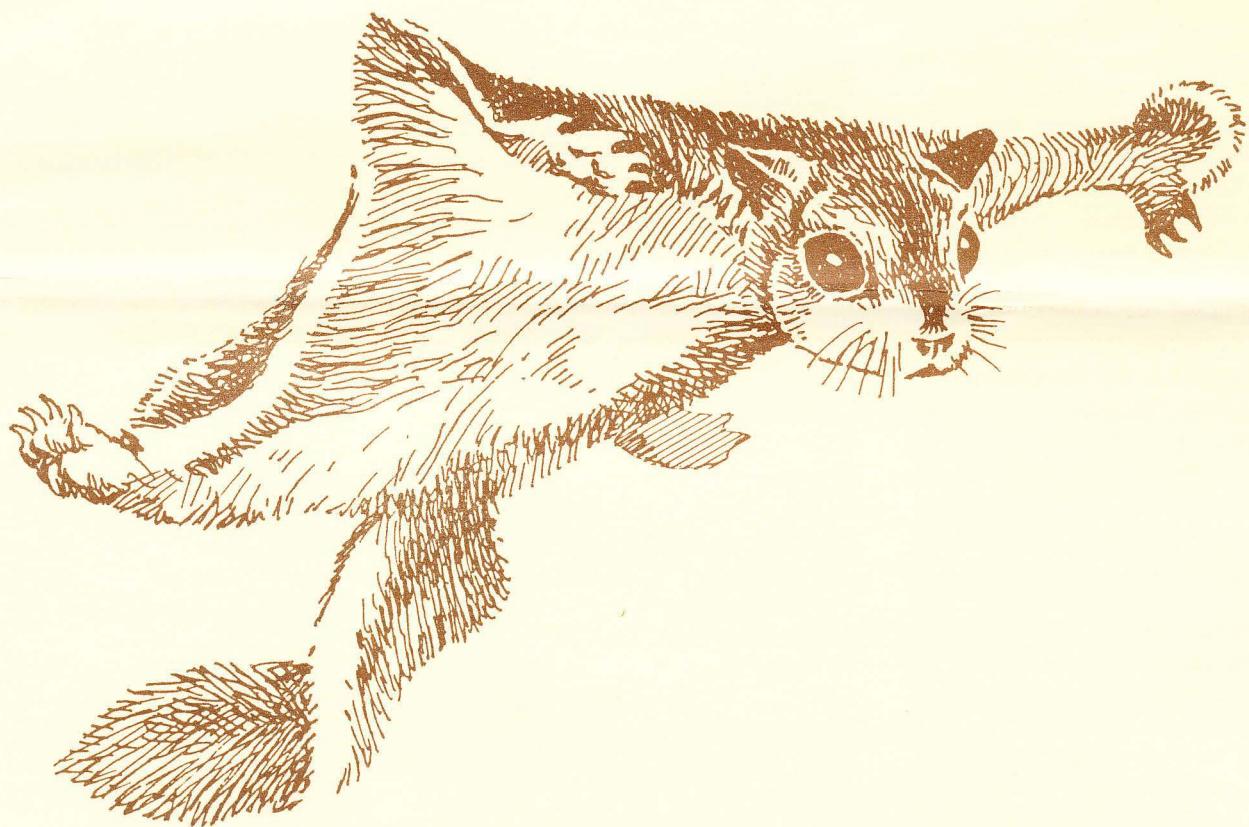
During the winter, northern flying squirrels will aggregate for warmth in tree cavities. However, they are active throughout the winter and the careful observer may locate tracks in the snow along fallen logs or under low shrubs.

On 31 July 1985, the federal government listed as endangered the two subspecies of northern flying squirrels found in the southern Appalachians. While it is much more common in the northern states and Canada, the northern flying squirrel is found only in higher elevations in mature northern hardwoods (beech-birch-sugar maple-black cherry), red spruce, and fir forests of the southern Appalachians. Although almost identical in appearance and habits, the subspecies *Glaucomys sabrinus fuscus*

is found only in West Virginia and Virginia, while the other, *Glaucomys sabrinus coloratus*, in North Carolina and Tennessee. Their habitat is very restricted and is decreasing in acreage due to development and logging. Recent studies indicate that the southern flying squirrel, though smaller, appears to be more aggressive and may out-compete its northern cousin for living quarters. As if these problems weren't enough, the southern flying squirrel harbors a type of parasite which, when transferred to the northern flying squirrel, often has a fatal effect. This phenomenon has been noted in penned squirrel studies and may hold true for wild squirrels when both live in close proximity.

The Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are currently conducting studies in an attempt to determine, first, where the northern flying squirrel is found in West Virginia and to also delineate specific habitat requirements and preferences. There were only ten documented records of the species in West Virginia from its discovery here in 1936 through 1984. All of these records are from three general areas in Randolph and Pocahontas counties. Precise locations are being withheld in order to protect the species.

Since early 1985, no less than 13 northern flying squirrels have been live-trapped and released. Over the next few years, we expect to intensify our research efforts and obtain information which will help us better understand and manage the northern flying squirrel, thus ensuring its continued existence in West Virginia.



Northern Flying Squirrel

Glaucomys sabrinus fuscus

West Virginia's Mighty Minnows

by Tom Joy, Fish Biologist

The streams, rivers, and impoundments of West Virginia provide homes for more than 150 species of fish, about one-third of which belong to one family called *Cyprinidae* - the mighty minnows!

Many people use the term "minnow" to mean any small fish, but scientists use it only in reference to cyprinids. Two of our largest minnows, the carp and goldfish, are not native to North America but have been imported - the carp from Asia by way of Europe, and the goldfish directly from Asia. Most native minnows reach maximum length of about 4 inches, but a few grow to be longer than 7 inches. Small size, however, does not signify a lack of importance. Minnows occur in most West Virginia waters where they outnumber all other fishes combined. They are an important link in the food chain because they feed on insect larvae and microscopic animals and plants, and are in turn eaten by larger fish. Many game fish populations in West Virginia would be on short rations if it were not for minnows.

Even if you've never paid much attention to minnows, you can tell a lot about one if you know what to look for. A minnow's body shape, mouth position and coloring are important clues to how it lives.

A flat-sided, deep-bodied minnow like the golden shiner can maneuver swiftly through thick growths of aquatic vegetation, but its deep body indicates that it prefers quiet waters. Minnows which live in swift streams also have flat sides for maneuverability, but their bodies are slender to present less surface area to the current. Such slender minnows usually feed in mid-water and have forward-opening mouths located at the extreme front ends of their bodies. They generally have dark backs and silvery sides - an effective camouflage for life in mid-water.

Minnows which feed on bottom ooze, plant material, or insect larvae

do not have to be as maneuverable to capture food. The bluntnose minnow, which lives primarily in quiet waters, has a cylindrical body. Its mouth is located behind and below its snout, and its lips project downward. The longnose dace is a bottom-feeding minnow which lives in swifter water. Its rounded body is somewhat flattened to let it hug the bottom and avoid the force of the current. Its mouth, located on the underside of the head, is also well positioned for picking up food items from the stream bottom. Irregular patterns on its back provide an effective camouflage against the stones and debris of the bottom.

Minnows reveal some of their most interesting characteristics during the spawning period. As day length and water temperature increase during spring and summer, each species is stimulated to spawn at its characteristic time. Males of many species develop intense colors as the spawning season approaches. The colors make recognition easier for females of their own species and presumably help to prevent hybridization with other species. These gaudy males probably recognize the comparatively drab females by behavior and shape. It is often the behavior of a female when she approaches a male of her own species that tells him she is a potential mate and not an aggressor, but the sight of her swollen belly may also be necessary before the male recognizes her.

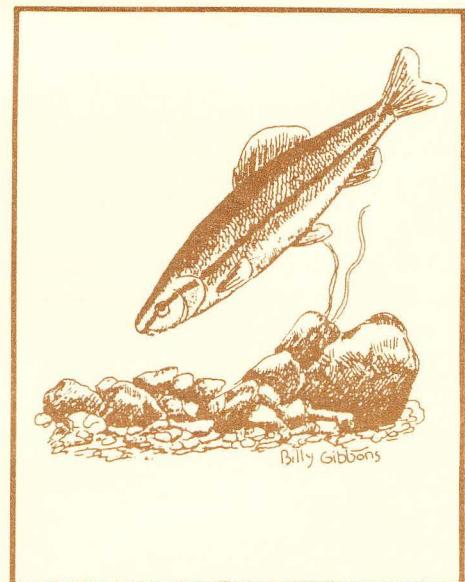
Males of many minnow species develop breeding tubercles on their heads, bodies and fins. These small, wart-like structures are used to fight with other males for a favored spawning site, in nest construction, in defense of the nest, and for holding the female during spawning.

Nesting activities of West Virginia minnows are varied. The golden shiner scatters its sticky eggs over beds of rooted aquatic plants or algae. Male bluntnose minnows dig out shallow nests under rocks or other objects and

clean the flat undersurfaces with the fleshy pad that develops on their backs; the females then attach the eggs in a mass to the roofs of the nests. Most West Virginia minnows, however, require an area of clean gravel on which to deposit their eggs and at least a little current to keep the eggs clean and supplied with oxygen. Some, such as male cutlip minnows and river chubs, create the required conditions by building a gravel nest in a suitable location. A few freeloaders profit by the nest builders' efforts. Minnows such as the common shiner, rosyface shiner, and southern redbelly dace seem to prefer using the nests of the river chub and its close relatives to constructing their own spawning sites.

Nest construction is no easy matter. A male river chub may carry stones for 20 to 30 hours over 4 or more days to construct a circular nest up to 3 feet in diameter and 8 inches high at the center. The title of "Champion Nest-Builder," however, belongs to the fallfish, a minnow which can grow to be 2 feet long. An early account mentioned fallfish nests which ranged in size from a "wheel-barrow load to four or five tons each."

The mighty minnows, with their fascinating physical and behavioral diversity, are a vital part of the complex world existing beneath the surface of West Virginia's waters.



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WEST VIRGINIA NONGAME NEWS

published quarterly by

Department of Natural Resources
Nongame Wildlife Program
Wildlife Resources Division

Arch A. Moore, Jr.
Governor

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Editor

Ideas for articles are welcomed

Nongame T-Shirts

Here is your chance to spread the word about the WV Nongame Wildlife Program. Nongame T-shirts are now available in adult sizes S, M, L and XL and children's 2-4, 6-8, 10-12 and 14-16. Colors and styles are variable according to size. Adult T-shirts are \$6.25 and children's \$5.00 postpaid. Simply send a check or money order made out to the WV Department of Natural Resources, along with size and color choice (substitutions may be necessary), to T-shirt, WV Dept. of Natural Resources, Nongame Unit, P.O. Box 67, Elkins, WV 26241.

First Edition of WV Wildlife Calendar

The WV Department of Natural Resources is now taking orders for the first edition of the WV Wildlife Calendar. Only \$5.00, the 14 by 22 inch calendar features paintings by WV artists. Each print has a description of the animal depicted. In addition, the calendar includes information on wild flowers, bird migrations, hunting and fishing, plus a wealth of additional wildlife facts concerning both game and nongame animals. The calendar runs from September 1985 through August 1986. Proceeds will help support the Nongame Wildlife Program.

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SUMMER 1985

Vol. 3 No. 3

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